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British Campaign for the Defence of Political Prisoners and Human Rights in Indonesia

MEMO

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The East Timor question will hopefully be resolved next year

At the present time, Indonesia needs to be extra careful

New York, Kompas

The Indonesian Government is for the first time beginning to work out its strategy to lay the groundwork for resolving the East Timor question once and for all. According to Foreign Minister, Mochtar Kusumaatmaja, in an interview with Kompas correspondent, Trees Nio, this year is considered to be decisive for East Timor. For three years running, discussion of East Timor has been postponed by the UN General Assembly; it cannot go on being postponed without some positive progress.

"It is therefore to be hoped that this year, based on the report of the UN Secretary General to be submitted to the General Assembly, it will be possible to adopt a decision which hopefully will lead to the matter being resolved next year," the Minister said.

The Minister would not say what decision he was hoping for, nor explain the basis he hoped would be established to ensure that the East Timor question can be completely resolved at the UN next year.

In his report to the UN General Assembly last year, Secretary-General Peres de Cuellar proposed postponement of the East Timor question so as to give him the opportunity to seek a comprehensive solution that is acceptable to the international community. The Secretary-General's efforts consist primarily of consultations and meetings with Portugal and Indonesia.

In order for East Timor to be deleted from the UN agenda and not further discussed, the General Assembly must adopt a special resolution which has majority support. The Minister said that preparations are under way to secure the greatest possible support for Indonesia's position.

Extra care needed

The Minister believes that, politically speaking, the question of East Timor has declined in importance. The emphasis has now shifted to humanitarian questions with activities mainly being undertaken by non-governmental organisations.

Moreover, recent events in the Philippines have indirectly had some bearing on Indonesia. These events have helped to concentrate people's attention on humanitarian matters, not only in East Timor as well as in Irian Jaya [West Papua], but even in Indonesia as a whole. He said that in the US, there was an atmopshere of questioning the Reagan Administration's policy in general, observing a distinction between its policy towards humanitarian questions in this or that developing countries. Some people believe that in developing countries which have good relations with the US, the US Administration is prepared to ignore human rights violations.

He went on to explain that this atmopshere is having a direct impact on East Timor. For those who are antagonistic towards Indonesia, this has been used as an opportunity to attack Indonesia. Since Indonesia's relations with the US are good, their logical conclusion is that the US is therefore not critical enough about human rights violations that may possibly be being committed by Indonesia - even though this is not necessarily true.

"This means that developing countries which have good relations with the US must be extra careful, precisely because of this attitude towards the US Administration. Thus, quite apart from the question of whether reports about

human rights violations are true or not, as a reaction to what has been happening recently in countries that happen to have close relations with the US, all countries that are close to the US are now in the limelight. This includes Indonesia," the Minister said,

Not objective

The Minister said that progress in East Timor was so good that observers should be drawing the conclusion that their opinion of Indonesia is wrong. "But the press is not always objective," he said, criticising the western press.

He said East Timor is now more open, and the western press has considerable freedom to visit East Timor. The main problem is that the cost of making a visit is very high. The roads in East Timor are still very bad, which means that most western journalists who go to Dili expect to be provided with a helicopter to visit other parts of the country. But it costs around Rp. 1.2 million [about $1,000] an hour to hire a heli. If they are willing to pay for this themselves, there's no problem. "If they go there at their own expense, this can certainly be done," he said.

East Timor is one of the main questions being discussed at a regional meeting of Indonesian ambassadors from the entire American continent, Australia, Japan and India. Other questions on the agenda include economic affairs and guidance of the staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs....